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## MATTHEW PRIOR: HIS RELATION TO ENGLISH VERS DE SOCIÉTÉ.

A FORTUNATE combination of remarkable and, if tradition be credited, in part picturesque circumstances, joined to Prior's undeniable talents, raised him from a humble origin to an exalted position in social esteem and courtly favor. As a diplomat and courtier he was associated with the most noted men of his time, with sovereigns in England and France, to whom he was confessedly a useful and agreeable servant, with statesmen, politicians, diplomats, churchmen, courtiers, men of action and men of letters. It would not be easy to name many men of eminence in England during the reigns of William and of Anne whose acquaintance Prior did not share, either as associate and friend or as opponent; and often it was even a greater distinction to have the enmity of greatness than its friendship. Prior's opportunities for intimate association with the life of gentility and good breeding were exceptional, for one of his lowly birth almost incredible. His long and brilliant official career and the magnitude of his social privilege are important forces in determining the nature of his position in the world of letters. They fill the measure of his preparation and supply him with equipment for his peculiar and memorable service in the history of English verse.

Prior was a man of the world perhaps more emphatically than any other British poet of equal rank. The Congress at The Hague in 1691, in which Prior played no really subordinate part, is called by Dr. Johnson an "assembly of princes and nobles to which Europe had perhaps scarcely seen anything equal." Then and afterwards he was a central figure in many a court function and stately official celebration. When he returned to London with the news of the peace of Ryswick, he was received with bells and bonfires like a warrior returning from victory. The Earl of Port-

land's embassy to the French capital, of which Prior was the secretary, is described by Macaulay as the "most magnificent that England had ever sent to a foreign court," and the secretary himself is said to have received for his own solemn entry into Paris three hundred pounds, an enormous sum two centuries ago. With astonishing tact and cleverness the joiner's son found himself at home, as it were, in the midst of courtly state and royal magnificence. It is certain not only that Prior was a useful member of the embassies in affairs of state importance and business relations, but also that his wit, his gallantry, his *savoir-faire* were an acknowledged ornament to the English legation. His acquired dignity did not "hang loose upon him like the giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief;" he seemed to the manner born.

Certain it is, also, that his disposition was of such a happy turn that he was a welcome guest in any house that he might honor with a visit, that the bright sallies of his wit made the drawing-room gayer for his presence and the sincerity of his friendship brightened the world he lived in. Matthew Prior was one of those sporadic examples defying explanation, men who, in the face of untoward circumstances, in contradiction to forces of heredity and early environment, develop an absolute genius for being gentlemen.

It is a commonplace of criticism that the poet inevitably writes his mind and heart, and in a no less degree his life and experience, into his work; that his poems are the mirror of his experience in the visible and invisible world. Even if his endeavor be to write objectively, impersonally, to hide or efface himself, by the very force of contradiction his form is often even more unmistakably discernible. Prior's poetry is closely linked with his career in the world. Yet his poems are not distinctly autobiographical, and it would not be easy to construct out of them a consistent, faithful account of the poet's life. The references, however numerous, to his own experience and adventure are, with few exceptions, such as the Epistles to Fleetwood Shephard, "For My Own Tombstone," "Ballad of Down-Hall," and the "Secretary," accidental rather than elemental. The influence of the poet's

outward circumstances was rather on the form and spirit of his verses than on their content.

Prior was in the world and of the world at a time in the intellectual and literary life of Britain when conditions were unusually favorable for the rise of an artificial and elegant poetry of the drawing-room, for the cultivation of *vers de société*. However colossally cumbersome his "Solomon," his "Carmen Sæculare," and other didactic or pompous outbursts, however much by mathematical computation his graver lines might outnumber and certainly outweigh his gayer and light-hearted ones, Prior's claim to our remembrance rests almost solely upon his society verse, and any one who affects to despise this form of poetic effort as produced on British soil must first reckon with Matthew Prior as a force not to be dismissed cavalierly.

It must be granted that the British climate has often been rather cruel to this frail flower of poesy. The English have always taken their poetry seriously if not sadly, and they have demanded of humor a certain gravity. Flippancy has been regarded as so deadly a sin, so dangerous an abyss, that most poets have hardly ventured to cultivate some very charming fields that lie just this side, for fear of falling over sometime inadvertently. The desire to seem profound has been a millstone around many a neck. When John Stuart Mill calls poetry "delineation of the deeper and more secret workings of human emotion" he expresses compactly the British attitude; and when Mill remarks, later on in the same essay, that poetry "is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation, eloquence of intercourse with the world," he formulates a classification which leaves no recognized place for our *poésies légères* and makes the whole genre an open contradiction. To be sure, he does not expressly deny the possibility that poetry as well as eloquence may be a fruit of intercourse with the world, but he distinctly implies this exclusion.

Three forces join inevitably to define the drift of any man's life, and determine the nature and worth of his contribution to the world: the spirit of the time in which he lives, his own

external relation to that time, and his own natural endowment of intellectual and emotional possibilities which may or may not govern the circumstances of his life. Prior's *vers de société* is the direct result of these forces working in unison; and his excellence, if not supremacy, on this field of literary activity could be plotted with almost scientific precision from an adequate statement of these energies.

About half of Prior's social verse consists of amorous effusions couched after the fashion of the time in the language of field and fold, such as the "Despairing Shepherd," "Cupid and Ganymede," "Mercury and Cupid," and the whole multitude of Chloe poems. Contrary to the opinion of the arch censor, Dr. Johnson, I must think, Prior does speak like a man of the world in all this, and particularly a man of his own world. *Vers de société* is of the world worldly, and never more so than in its feigned efforts to seem otherwise. Its personages wander sometimes in the fields and woodlands, but it is a region visible only from the drawing-room windows. Amorous swains pine away for faithless shepherdesses, but they are only a part of the old pathetic court masquerade. Prior's use of idyllic life is purely conventional, and there is no suggestion that he selected this imagery because of its inherent beauty, certainly not because he could play the elemental passions of mankind against its background of simplicity. He chose it simply because it seemed decorative and was then fashionable. In his lines "Written at Paris, 1700, in the Beginning of Robe's Geography," he gives expression to a desire for rural life.

Great Mother, let me once be able  
To have a garden, house, and stable;  
That I may read, and ride, and plant,  
Superior to desire or want;  
And as health fails, and years increase,  
Sit down, and think, and die in peace.  
Oblige thy favorite undertakers  
To throw me in but twenty acres;  
This number sure they may allow—  
For pasture ten, and ten for plow.

But this is merely the pose of the city dweller, the result of

a then fashion which found its expression also in Pope's "Ode on Solitude" and Cowley's "Wish."

*Vers de société*, like the life of which it is the type, cherishes no genuine love for nature, no hearty response to nature's allurements, no sympathy with nature's moods. Its assumed acquaintance is, on closer scrutiny, shallow and flimsy. Prior's description of the natural world is meager and platitudinous. He mentions, perforce, the meadows, the crystal brooks, the shady paths and groves. His forests are of beech, myrtle, and laurel, and the lark and nightingale sing there. In short, his knowledge is second-hand and his expression trite. The absence of metaphoric allusions to nature is marked. One poem, "The Lady's Looking-Glass," stands notably in a class alone, for an elaborate simile drawn from nature forms its very essence:

Celia and I the other day  
Walked o'er the sand hills to the sea.  
The setting sun adorned the coast,  
His beams entire, his fierceness lost;  
And in the surface of the deep  
The winds lay only not asleep.  
The nymph did like the scene appear,  
Serenely pleasant, calmly fair.  
Soft fell her words, as flew the air.  
With secret joy I heard her say  
That she would never miss one day  
A walk so fine, a sight so gay.

And the following lines continue the figure under the changed conditions of mind and tempest. It is significant that the whole simile is said to be imitated from Moschus. The only nature similes approaching this in breadth of treatment and unexpected clearness of insight are found in the lines from the "Dove:"

Have you observed a sitting hare,  
Listening, and, fearful of the storm  
Of horns and hounds, clap back her ear  
Afraid to keep or leave her form?  
  
Or have you marked a partridge quake,  
Viewing the towering falcon nigh;  
She cuddles low behind the brake;  
Nor would she stay, nor dares she fly.

The rather numerous nature similes found in "Solomon" are in general amplified paraphrases from Scripture. Aside from these unusual and partly borrowed figures, Prior's dependence upon nature's treasure-house of suggestion lies only in the direction of its evanescence.

Prior has been criticised for introducing an element of sadness, "the decay of beauty," into his verses, but mistakenly, I think. The thought of life's brevity, or still more of the butterfly swiftness of beauty's passing, is the one touch of nature which in the gay world links the artificial with the real. It is the one bit of seriousness which the drawing-room, perhaps mockingly, allows itself; the boudoir existence recognizes its own evanescence, but acknowledges it in its own way. The poet is writing of a class and also for a class of people who do not deny the serious element in life, but trifle with it. They are characterized by the inability to reflect sustainedly and continuously upon the deeper of life's losses, upon the graver meaning of age's advances, without confusing such sentiments with trivial disappointments and petty disasters. They are unable to separate definitely the tragedies of life from the catastrophes of the toilet. Prior's verses dealing with the misfortunes of vanity, such as the eyebrow poems, "Phyllis's Age" and "Forma Bonum Fragile," are masterpieces of drawing-room cruelty, but they never descend into the vulgar offensiveness of Swift in some of his lines on similar themes.

Prior's philosophy of change in life's fair fortunes is contained in the sentiment of the lady who offers her looking-glass to Venus:

Venus, take my votive glass;  
Since I am not what I was,  
What from this day I shall be,  
Venus, let me never see.

Or in the quatrain, "*Quid sit futurum cras fuge quærere.*"

For what to-morrow shall disclose  
May spoil what you to-night propose;  
England may change or Chloe stray;  
Love and life are for to-day.

From this point of view the poems of Herrick present a noteworthy contrast to those of Prior, a contrast which throws the characteristics of Prior's verse still more markedly into relief. Prior's description of nature is unconvincing, his supply of allusion and comparison is easily exhausted, and his nature vocabulary seems often faltering even for his own purpose. Herrick's verse is overflowing with an abundance of detail, intimate and unexpected, of illuminating allusion and suggestion. Prior does not mention an appearance of nature for its own sake, for its own intrinsic beauty. Blossoms are to Prior a means for Chloe's adornment.

The pride of every grove I chose,  
The violet sweet and lily fair,  
The dappled pink and blushing rose,  
To deck my charming Chloe's hair.

And he rarely thinks of them as living a life of their own apart from their distinctly humble office of adorning nymphs. And his sorrow at their fading is rather his vexation at an annoyance to Chloe than a pensive grief at the flower's own withering. With Herrick it is a sincere affection for the life of the great, beautiful, incomprehensible world. There is for him no animate and inanimate nature. It is the deeper kinship between man and the flower which holds him as by a spell. To Herrick it is not merely the fading of the garland, not merely the decay of beauty; but the death of the flower, the snuffing out of life and being, and the extinction of that which seems almost conscious existence. When Herrick cries,

Fair pledges of a fruitful tree,  
Why do ye fall so fast?

and

Why do ye weep, sweet babes? Can tears  
Speak grief in you,  
Who were but born  
Just as the modest morn  
Teemed her refreshing dew?

and other similar lines equally memorable and remembered that need no naming, he is possessed with the thought of



unity in all earthly experience, a unity which makes his metaphor something vital, no idle fancy, no tissue of delicate conceits to decorate his verse. He is touched by the same spirit of serious reflection which moves George Herbert to write the lines beginning

I made a posie while the day ran by,

and to see in the exquisite perfection of the flower an image of man's own exceeding but fleeting possibilities. It is the quality of genuinely deep feeling, sustained and insisted upon, which places Herrick's immortal lyrics above the plane of drawing-room verse and excludes him from any fancied competition for supremacy. London is not his "native country," however much he may long for its gay life in his Western banishment. In his "Wood Notes Wild" there is little suggestive of the city.

Society verse must bear, at any rate, the semblance of spontaneity; the artifice of its making must be concealed. Its thrusts of wit, its subtle turns of thought, clever analogies, and delicate suggestions must be unexpected, impossible to anticipate, yet obvious and seemingly inevitable when once uttered. They must not be so remote nor so complicated as to suggest the labors of composition or to burden the genteel mind with the strain of application. Society refuses to devote an undue amount of intellectual energy even to the appreciation of its own pleasantries.

Carew, for example, certainly oversteps the boundaries of the ideal in this respect. It was said in his day that his poems were composed with difficulty, and to-day we find them full of far-fetched figures and odd conceits, reminding us of Dr. Donne's mannerisms. The lines

In her fair cheeks two pits do lie,  
To bury those slain by her eye;  
So, spite of death, this comforts me,  
That fairly buried I shall be;  
My grave with rose and lily spread,  
O 'tis a life to be so dead—

and the following effusion,

When this fly lived, she used to play  
In the sunshine all the day;  
Till, coming near my Celia's sight,  
She found a new and unknown light,  
So full of glory, as it made  
The noonday sun a gloomy shade;  
Then this amorous fly became  
My rival, and did court my flame.  
She did from hand to bosom skip,  
And from her breath, her cheek, and lip,  
Sucked all the incense and the spice,  
And grew a bird of paradise.  
At last into her eye she flew;  
There scorched in flames and drowned in dew  
Like Phaëton from the sun's sphere  
She fell, and with her dropped a tear;  
Of which a pearl was straight composed,  
Wherein her ashes lie inclosed.  
Thus she received from Celia's eye  
Funeral flame, tomb obsequy—

are unmistakably, if somewhat exaggerated, examples of an unfailing tendency in Carew's poetry. Such verses may be creditable to the ingenuity of the poet, but are hardly a felicitous exercise for the imagination. Even the more delightful of Carew's verses, "Ask me no more," "Amongst the myrtles as I walked," and the "Primrose," are not free from the suggestion of laborious manufacture. Overloaded with exuberant fancies, his poems lack the buoyancy, the light-hearted capriciousness, the facile grace of Prior's similar efforts.

Prior's erotic measures are, barring the imagery of mythology in which many of them are molded, marked by purity and directness of allusion and simplicity of compliment. In the "Better Answer" to Chloe jealous we find a good example of Prior's straightforward and sparing use of analogies, without enlargements and without complexity—

The god of us verse-men (you know, child), the sun,  
How after his journeys he set up his rest,  
If at morning o'er earth 'tis his fancy to run,  
At night he reclines on his Thetis's breast.  
So, when I am wearied with wandering all day,  
To thee, my delight, in the evening I come;  
No matter what beauties I saw in my way,  
They were but my visits, but thou art my home—

and in his lines "To a Lady, She Refusing to Continue a Dispute with Me," is recorded the most gallant, the most urbane compliment which the poets of society have bequeathed us:

Spare, gen'rous victor, spare the slave  
Who did unequal war pursue:  
That more than triumph he might have,  
In being overcome by you.

In the dispute, whate'er I said,  
My heart was by my tongue belied,  
And in my looks you might have read  
How much I argued on your side.

You far from danger as from fear  
Might have sustained an open fight;  
For seldom your opinions err.  
Your eyes are always in the right.

Alas! not hoping to subdue,  
I only to the fight aspired;  
To keep the beauteous foe in view  
Was all the glory I desired.

We might pit against it Landor's quatrain, to which Mr. Swinburne says there is nothing comparable in the language:

Stand close around, ye Stygian set,  
With Dirce in one boat conveyed;  
Or Charon, seeing, may forget  
That he is old and she a shade.

Yet, however matchless are these lines, the compliment is not a courtesy of the drawing-room, and in this very contrast we have a hint of Landor's position as a writer of *vers de société*. Landor's lighter verses are instinct with tenderness, with the emotion which controls mightily, which destroys and makes alive, with subdued passion, and are expressed often in a form which is the perfection of poetical utterance. They are greater poetry than can be considered characteristic of the gay world. It is only recognizing in them a higher merit to say that they are above its bubble life.

Some interesting thoughts arise from a hasty comparison of Prior with another poet who has been regarded as his rival on this field. Praed is, according to Mr. Dobson, "supreme

as a writer of society verse in its exacter sense," and other critics have awarded him a similar distinction. I must think that these British comments and appreciations are partly a natural result of Praed's intense modernity of tone. Praed's verse is in spirit not even as far away as yesterday. A pruning away of some trifling detail would in many cases be sufficient to make Praed a poet of the very day and hour. Praed may be considered almost as a contemporary as far as concerns the present difficulty in forming any ultimate judgment; and farther Praed's position may be in some measure due to a legacy of appreciation, a perpetuated prejudice in his favor, handed down from those who knew him, who felt the spell of a charming personality, and could never sunder themselves from it for critical purposes; to whom he was ever a shining presence, a gifted son of the Muses, whom they loved well but the gods loved better. Some writers become immortal by the memory of their personality, which casts a spell of blindness over contemporary criticism and perpetuates itself, an undeniable presence, in subsequent thought.

*Vers de Société* has been often likened to miniature painting or to the wonderful porcelain of Meissen, but I am sure that the reading of Prior's poems could never have suggested the simile. Society verse is characterized by a well-rounded completeness, by faultless workmanship, an unobtrusive polishing, as of a gem. Lines and rhymes must seem to be inevitable, facile, without labor. The whole must be buoyant, airy, sparkling, infused throughout with an air of elegant yet unobtrusive conventionality. Praed's verse is fluent, conversational, easy, but his lines are loaded with irrelevant detail, and are often marred by forced and jarring rhymes. They have not the delicacy of miniature painting, nor the air of fragility which characterize the miracles of Dresden. A fragile poem is one whose verse is so delicately rhythmed, whose words are so inevitably chosen, that not one word, one rhyme, one order could be omitted or altered without the shattering of its beauty. Has not Prior attained this in the "Garland," "Her Right Name," and in the faultless lines beginning, "The merchant to secure his treasure?" and

does he not approach it in numerous other verses such as "To a Young Lady Fond of Fortune Telling," "To the Honorable Charles Montague," "The Question," and "Lisetta's Reply?" Place side by side Prior's "The Female Phaëton" and Praed's "Belle of the Ballroom" and the difference between the two poets, the superiority of Prior's workmanship, will spring to the light. Prior's poem I quote in full because of its comparative brevity.

Thus Kitty, beautiful and young,  
And wild as colt untamed,  
Bespoke the fair from which she sprung  
With little rage inflamed;

Inflamed with rage at sad restraint  
Which wise mamma ordained,  
And sorely vexed to play the saint  
Whilst wit and beauty reigned.

"Shall I thumb holy books, confined  
With Abigails forsaken?  
Kitty's for other things designed,  
Or I am much mistaken.

Must Lady Jenny frisk about,  
And visit with her cousins?  
At balls must she make all the rout,  
And bring home hearts by dozens?

What has she better, pray, than I?  
What hidden charms to boast,  
That all mankind for her should die,  
Whilst I am scarce a toast?

Dearest mamma, for once let me  
Unchained my fortune try;  
I'll have my earl as well as she,  
Or know the reason why.

I'll soon with Jenny's pride quit score,  
Make all her lovers fall;  
They'll grieve I was not loosed before;  
She, I was loosed at all."

Fondness prevailed, mamma gave way;  
Kitty, at heart's desire,  
Obtained the chariot for a day,  
And set the world on fire.

Praed's poem is too long for full repetition, and it will be sufficient to quote a few lines.

She talked of politics or prayers,  
Of Southey's prose or Wordsworth's sonnets,  
Of dangles or of dancing bears,  
Of battles or the last new bonnets.  
By candlelight, at twelve o'clock,  
To me it mattered not a tittle;  
If those bright lips had quoted Locke,  
I might have thought they murmured Little.

Through sunny May, the rough, sultry June,  
I loved her with a love eternal;  
I spoke her praises to the moon,  
I wrote them to the Sunday Journal.  
My mother laughed; I soon found out  
That ancient ladies have no feeling.  
My father frowned; but how should gout  
See any happiness in kneeling?  
She was the daughter of a Dean  
Rich, fat, and rather apoplectic;  
She had one brother, just thirteen,  
Whose color was extremely hectic.

The last lines at least are nothing but the doggerel of the street, the boldness of nonsense, rhymes without their cleverness or charm. It would perhaps be unfair to Praed not to quote one stanza, the penultimate, which is delicate and faultless, fulfilling the most exacting requirements for the genre.

Our love was like most other loves—  
A little glow, a little shiver,  
A rosebud and a pair of gloves,  
And "fly not yet"—upon the river;  
Some jealousy of some one's heir,  
Some hopes of dying broken-hearted,  
A miniature, a lock of hair,  
The usual vows—and then we parted.

A bit of Dresden workmanship upon a vase of ruder design. But Praed cannot maintain this level of elegance. So fascinating a picture as his "Vicar" begins with the lines

Some years ago, ere time and taste  
Had turned our parish topsy-turvy,  
When Darnel Park was Darnel waste,  
And roads as little known as scurvy—

Obviously the last simile, indolently introduced for the sake of rhyme, is the very ocean deep of inelegance.

Praed lacks that sense of finished proportion, that artistic poise which tells him when to have done with a thing. A poem, delicately, airily conceived is buried by a multiplication of detail, an excess of combinations, suggesting mathematical, bibliographical amplitude and completeness. The force of his figure is often choked by his own mass. An explained witticism is an offense to the intelligence, and an amplified figure is an insult to the imagination. Compare Praed's "Song of Impossibilities" or its companion piece, "Love's Eternity," with Prior's "A Simile." The latter is as follows:

Dear Thomas, didst thou never pop  
Thy head into a tin-man's shop?  
There, Thomas, didst thou never see  
( 'Tis but by way of simile)  
A squirrel spend his little rage  
In jumping round a rolling cage?  
The cage, as either side turned up  
Striking a ring of bells a-top?  
Moved in the orb, pleased with the chimes,  
The foolish creature thinks he climbs;  
But here or there, turn wood or wire,  
He never gets two inches higher.  
So fares it with those merry blades  
That frisk it under Pindus' shades.  
In noble songs and lofty odes  
They tread on stars and talk with gods;  
Still dancing in an airy round,  
Still pleased with their own verses' sound;  
Brought back, how fast soe'er they go,  
Always aspiring, always low.

The theme in both cases is simple and the application contemporary; but Prior confines himself to a single, picturesque, adequate figure, sufficiently elaborated, delicately painted. Praed, on the other hand, runs wild into a catalogue of impossibilities, naming some sixty remote contingences, which weary the reader and confuse the purpose. The same is true of Praed's famous "Letter of Advice" and the three "Chants of the Brazen-Head," and of others. He seems to stop from pure exhaustion of himself or material; the reader

is exhausted long since. The drawing-room is not fond of categories, and wearies of recapitulations or exhaustive lists even of the amusing.

When Prior suggests that the great world of fashion, of which he is a part,

Is a dull farce, an empty show,  
Powder, and pocket glass and beau;  
A staple of romance and lies,  
False tears, and real perjuries,

we recognize the voice not of one satiated with the glitter of show, but perceive the poet fabricating a pretty fiction, enjoying his own temporary pose. He resembles his own fond Celadon, who cries—

But O, my Celia, when thy swain  
Desires to see a court again,  
May Heaven around this destined head,  
The choicest of its curses shed—

and who, with the words just warm from his lips,

Hastened to court to beg a place.

This conventional disgust of the world with itself finds its parallel passage in Praed's "Our Ball:"

But out on the world! from the flowers  
It shuts out the sunshine of truth,  
It blights the green leaves in the bowers,  
It makes an old age of our youth;  
And the flow of our feeling once in it,  
Like a streamlet beginning to freeze,  
Though it cannot turn ice in a minute  
Grows harder by sudden degrees.

Prior's is society's comment on itself; Praed's is the criticism of an outside observer. Even upon Praed's specific field of political comment and satire, I must think Prior his superior, and suggest a comparison of Prior's poem entitled "Flies," with similar skits of Praed. Prior's lines deserve quotation:

Say, sire of insects, mighty Sol  
(A fly upon the chariot pole  
Cries out), what blue-bottle alive  
Did ever with such fury drive?



Tell, Beelzebub, great father, tell  
 (Says t'other, perched upon the wheel)  
 Did ever any mortal fly  
 Raise such a cloud of dust as I?

My judgment turned the whole debate,  
 My valor saved the sinking State.  
 So talk two idle buzzing things;  
 Toss up their heads, and stretch their wings,  
 But let the truth to light be brought:  
 This neither spoke, nor t'other fought,  
 No merit in their own behavior,  
 Both raised, but by their party's favor.

A bit of satire, personally stinging doubtless then, and retaining its force for all time, unchanged like the jests of Aristophanes. Here, as elsewhere, Praed's fault of prolixity makes quotation even for purposes of comparison difficult. Yet the most delightful of Praed's parliamentary fancies is brief and quotable:

Sleep, Mr. Speaker; it's surely fair,  
 If you don't in your bed, that you should in your chair;  
 Longer and longer still they grow,  
 Tory and Radical, aye and no.  
 Talking by night, and talking by day;  
 Sleep, Mr. Sleeper, sleep; sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker; slumber lies  
 Light and brief on a speaker's eyes;  
 Fielden or Finn, in a minute or two,  
 Some disorderly thing will do;  
 Riot will chase repose away,  
 Sleep, Mr. Sleeper, sleep; sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Sleeper; dream of the time  
 When loyalty was not quite a crime;  
 When Grant was a pupil in Canning's school,  
 And Palmerston fancied Wood a fool.  
 Lord, how principles pass away!  
 Sleep, Mr. Speaker, sleep; sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sweet to men  
 Is the sleep that comes but now and then;  
 Sweet to the sorrowful, sweet to the ill,  
 Sweet to the children who work in the mill.  
 You have more need of sleep than they;  
 Sleep, Mr. Sleeper, sleep; sleep while you may.

These are refreshing, engaging lines, to be sure, but has not some of the light faded out of them since the early thirties? Yet they possess much more of the time-defying element than any of their companions.

Praed's most charming pieces, "Childhood and His Visitors," "My Little Cousins," "School and School Fellows," all included in Mr. Locker-Lampson's collection, are surely, both as regards subject and manner of treatment, on the border land of other and higher types of poetry. They lead us backward to childhood with its "glimpses of remembered heaven," to "voices whose every word is song," to schoolboy days with a tenderness which has little in common with the capricious chatter of the drawing-room. From their pensive, retrospective emotionality it is a far cry to that "charmed circle known conventionally as 'good society,' whose graver and deeper impulses are subordinated to a code of artificial manners." If any aspect of childhood be regarded as a theme for *vers de société*, it is that of which Prior writes in the well-known lines which Mr. Swinburne calls "the most adorable of nursery idyls" in the language "To a child of quality, five years old, the author then forty."

Lords, knights, and squires, the numerous band  
That wear the fair Miss Mary's fetters,  
Were summoned by her high command  
To show their passions by their letters.

My pen amongst the rest I took,  
Lest those bright eyes that cannot read  
Should dart their kindling fires, and look  
The power they have to be obeyed.

Nor quality, nor reputation,  
Forbid me yet my flame to tell;  
Dear five-years-old befriends my passion,  
And I may write till she can spell.

For while she makes her silkworms beds  
With all the tender things, I swear;  
Whilst all the house my passion reads  
In papers round her baby's hair.

She may receive and own my flame,  
For, though the strictest prudes should know it,  
She'll pass for a most virtuous dame,  
And I for an unhappy poet.

Then too, alas! when she shall tear  
 The lines some younger rival sends;  
 She'll give me leave to write, I fear,  
 And we shall still continue friends.

For, as our different ages move,  
 'Tis so ordained (would Fate but mend it!)  
 That I shall be past making love  
 When she begins to comprehend it.

It is possible to admit the charm of Praed's poems, their ease, their drollery, and, more than all, their hidden heartiness; but it is also possible to deny them supreme merit as representatives of a certain genre.

In considering the nature of Prior's genius it is significant to note that his success or failure in forms of poetry other than that which may be designated unquestionably *vers de société* depends directly upon his adherence to the manner and tone characteristic of that genre. Such are the brief narratives and the relation of incident or anecdote, where the tone is bright and sparkling, and the art of telling the story is unaffected, straightforward, and nimble. They are the extended witticisms or polished tales of the drawing-room raconteur, and as such retain characteristics of the briefer, lighter *vers de société* to which they are akin. Here belong the tales "Paulo Purganti," "The Ladle," and "Hans Carvel," all more or less gross in subject-matter, but told with spirit and grace. The "Young Gentleman in Love," "An English Padlock," the "Chameleon," and the "Epitaph on Sauntering Jack and Idle Joan," which is perhaps the classic expression of the indifferent life.

It would be absurd to claim that all of Prior's light verses possess in a superlative degree all of the essential characteristics of *vers de société*. Yet it does not seem too much to state that, of all the English writers who have ventured on this garden bypath of poetry, Prior has most nearly attained its ideal, that no other poet has left us so many poems fulfilling its requirements in so generous a measure.

HARVEY WATERMAN THAYER.